# RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES:

## A Handbook for Early Childhood Programs

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

# PART 3

# RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC EMERGENCIES AND SERIOUS OCCURRENCES

# 3 RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC EMERGENCIES AND SERIOUS OCCURRENCES

So far, this handbook has looked at the big picture of emergency response planning, preparation and response. It will now focus on a number of specific emergencies and provide a suggested response plan, using the headings:

- Be Prepared
  - things you can do ahead of time
- Response Check List
  - steps to take during the actual situation
- Follow-up
  - things to do after the situation has passed
- Contacts and Resources
  - people and other resources who can help you plan and respond to the situation
- (R) Regulations to Look Up
  - the number(s) of any *Child Day Care Standards Regulations* that are relevant to the situation in question, and that you must follow.
  - most situations are serious enough to require a Serious Occurrence Report. Regulation 13 will be referenced but not repeated in detail, over and over again. For details see Serious Occurrence Report in Part 2.

## 3.1 Suspected Child Abuse ...

... when a staff member or operator suspects or knows that a child needs legal protection because of abandonment, neglect, physical, sexual and/or emotional maltreatment

... whether the alleged abuse is happening at the centre or family day home, or outside of the early childhood program

### Be Prepared

- ✓ Make sure all staff know that they must report to a Child Protection Worker if they have any information that a child needs protection – i.e. is the victim of some sort of abuse or neglect. (R)
- ✓ Provide staff training about signs of abuse or neglect.
- ✓ Provide staff training about what to do if a child discloses (tells them) that they are being abused.
- ✓ Make sure that all procedures at the facility support, and do not contradict, the Child and Family Services Act.

### Response Check List

- ✓ As soon as a person suspects abuse – they don't have to have proof – they must report it to the local Child Protection Worker, or designate including a Social Worker. If the local Child Protection Worker or designate is not available make the report directly to the RCMP.
- ✓ If a child makes a verbal disclosure, listen to the child in a caring and calm manner. Let the child tell his/her story and assure them that telling the story is the right thing to do and that what is happening is not their fault.
- ✓ Do not make promises to the child that you will not be able to keep – e.g. telling them everything is all right or that you will not tell anyone else.
- ✓ Following the disclosure immediately:
  - write down and date any comments or statements made by the child during the disclosure. (Try as much as possible to use the child's exact words.)
  - collect and date any art made by the child at that time.
  - document any behaviour or emotional signs.
- ✓ Make a verbal report to the Child Protection Worker, Social Worker or RCMP. The report must be made by the person who suspects abuse and/or to whom the child made the disclosure.
- ✓ Once the report has been made the Child Protection Worker and/or RCMP will handle all aspects of the allegations. Follow their directions, requests for information, etc.
- ✓ Let the operator or primary staff person know that you have made a report but do not provide any of the specific information involved in the report.
- ✓ If the operator or primary staff person is the alleged abuser, do not tell them about the reported child abuse.
- ✓ You may want to write a report. This is not required by law but it may help you to recall, and provide important details while still fresh in your mind. Store the report in a confidential manner. If you give a copy of your report to the Child Protection Worker, once you know it has been received, destroy your copy in a way that ensures confidentiality – e.g. shredding.
- ✓ Do not contact the parents/guardians about the report.
- ✓ Do not discuss the report with others including other staff members.

## Follow-up

- ✓ Inform the Regional Early Childhood Consultant about the report of suspected child abuse. Do not provide details and do not complete a Serious Occurrence Report.
- ✓ Cooperate with the Child Protection Worker of RCMP as needed during their investigation.
- ✓ Be aware that the person making the report may need to see a counsellor to work through their own feelings about the alleged abuse and disclosure.

## Contacts/Resources

- Child Protection Worker or designate including Social Worker or RCMP.
- Dealing with Child Abuse: A Handbook for School Personnel – FAQs, 2012. Written for schools it is also useful for childhood programs. Available at www.ece.gov.nt.ca or through your Regional Early Childhood Consultant.
- Regional Early Childhood Consultant

## (R) Regulations to Look Up

- 🔎 Regulation 10(2): Operators must ensure that all staff understand their duty, according to the Child and Family Services Act, to report to a Child Protection Worker if the staff person has any information that a child needs protection under that Act.

## 3.2 Custody Issues ...

... when a family member who does not have legal custody of a child tries to communicate or interact with the child, or pick up the child, or

... when a person who is prevented from accessing the child by either agreement or court order, tries to communicate or interact with the child, or pick up the child, or

... when a person who has not been named on child's Application for Enrolment tries to pick up the child

### Be Prepared

- ✓ Make sure all staff know the names of people that have a parent's permission to pick up a child. (R)
- ✓ Make sure all staff know which parents, or other people, do not have access to a child. (R)
- ✓ Consider having a photo or good description of a non-custodial parent or anyone who should not have access to a child so that staff will recognize the person if the arrive at the centre or family day home.
- ✓ Identify one primary staff person to approach and speak to the parent or other person who is legally prohibited from accessing the child, or who is trying to pick-up a child without the parent's permission.
- ✓ Develop and practise Lockdown and Playground Evacuation Procedures:
  - Ask the RCMP and the Regional Early Childhood Consultant to help develop these procedures.
  - See Lockdown and Playground Evacuation Procedures, in Part 2
  - Practise these procedures with children and staff at least twice a year.
- ✓ Include information on the Lockdown and Playground Evacuation Procedures in the parent handbook.
- ✓ Make sure that there is a way to communicate to all rooms as well as all outdoor areas, and to all staff away from the facility on outings with children.

### Response Check List[3]

- ✓ Before approaching a person who has no right of access to a child make sure that another staff member is aware of the situation so that they can monitor the situation and take action to move children out of the area if necessary.
- ✓ Calmly approach the person:
  - using your judgment to assess the situation,
  - leaving at least an arms length between you – avoid physical contact,
  - making sure you have access to an exit, and
  - giving the intruder access to an exit, if possible.
- ✓ Make sure you have the person's attention and introduce yourself – your name and position, either primary staff or operator.
- ✓ Calmly and directly remind the person that they are legally restricted from having access to the child, or that the parent did not name them as someone to whom the child could be released.
- ✓ Calmly ask the person to leave.
- ✓ If the person hesitates or refuses to leave, clearly and slowly explain that you will have to call the police.
- ✓ If the person still will not leave or becomes agitated and/or confrontational:
  - call the RCMP,
  - order lockdown, or playground evacuation depending on what's safest for the children,
  - try to stall as long as possible until police arrive,
  - if necessary, seek safety for yourself away from the person in a location separate from where the children and other staff are,
  - follow directions of the RCMP.
- ✓ Contact the custodial parent as soon as possible and inform them of the situation.

[3] These procedures provide a general idea of how to approach a non-custodial parent or other person who is legally prohibited from accessing a child. Use your own judgment and a calm approach when deciding exactly how to respond in a given situation.

## Follow-up

- ✓ Inform the Regional Early Childhood Consultant of the situation as soon as possible.
- ✓ Keep a list of your actions. This will be helpful if there is any follow-up or investigation by police or Social Services.
- ✓ Complete a Serious Occurrence Report and fax it to the Regional Early Childhood Consultant by the next business day at the latest.(R) Also, put a copy of the report in the child's file. (R)
- ✓ Offer staff involved opportunities to debrief and talk about their experience, if required. (See Situational Debriefing in Part 2.)
- ✓ Conduct an operational debriefing if required. (See Operational Debriefing in Part 2.)

## Contacts/Resources

- RCMP
- Custodial parent
- Child Protection Worker/Social Worker
- Regional Early Childhood Consultant

## (R) Regulations to Look Up

- 🔎 Regulation 11(1): Parents must complete an Application for Enrolment to enrol a child in a centre or family day home.
- 🔎 Regulation 11(2)(d): The application must include the names of people who can pick up the child.
- 🔎 Regulation 11(2)(e): The application must include the names of people who, by court order or agreement, are prohibited from accessing or picking up the child. A copy of the court order or agreement must be included with the Application for Enrolment.
- 🔎 Regulation 13(1), 13(2), and 11(4)(f): Operators must:
  - complete a Serious Occurrence Report for any serious incident affecting the facility or early childhood program, including but not limited to, an accident causing injury, the onset of serious illness, or the presence of someone with a communicable disease, and
  - fax it to the Regional Early Childhood Consultant by the next business day at the latest, and
  - put a copy in the child's file, if the serious occurrence involved a specific child.

(For details, see Serious Occurrence Report in Part 2.)